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UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

FOR

LASIK LAMINAR FLOW SYSTEM

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to an air flow system that can reduce the amount of contaminates at the site of 5 an ophthalmic procedure.

2. Background Information

There have been developed various techniques for 10 correcting the vision of a patient. For example, there is a medical procedure that varies the curvature of a cornea 15 using a laser. This procedure is commonly referred to as Laser in situ Keratomileusis (LASIK).

In a LASIK procedure, a surgeon cuts the cornea to create a flap. The flap is peeled back to expose the 15 stroma layer of the cornea. A laser beam is then directed into the stroma to ablate the cornea and vary the refractive characteristics of the eye. After the ablation step, the flap is placed back onto the cornea to complete the procedure.

LASIK procedures are typically performed in a room that may have dust particles and other contaminants. The contaminants may become attached to the stroma and lead to a post-operative infection of the eye. The stroma tissue 5 has a tendency to attract and retain contaminants.

Additionally, the ablated stroma is sometimes aspirated so that the patient does not smell burning tissue.

Unfortunately, aspirating the burned tissue pulls air and accompanying contaminants into the eye.

10 To reduce the amount of contaminants introduced to the cornea during a procedure the surgeon will frequently apply an irrigation fluid to the eye. The irrigation fluid may over-hydrate the cornea and possibly interfere with the ablation of the stroma by the laser beam. It would be 15 desirable to provide a system that can reduce the amount of contaminants introduced to a cornea in an ophthalmic procedure.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

One embodiment of the present invention is a system that can be used to perform an ophthalmic procedure. The 5 system may include a patient support that supports a patient and a light source, which can direct a beam of light onto the patient's cornea. The system may also include an airflow module that directs a flow of air above the cornea.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is an illustration showing an embodiment of a system of the present invention;

5 Figure 2 is an illustration showing an airflow module of the system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

One embodiment of the present invention provides an airflow module that can direct a flow of air across the 5 cornea of a patient during a LASIK procedure. The flow of air reduces the amount of contaminants that may become attached to the cornea during the procedure.

Referring to the drawings more particularly by reference numbers, Figure 1 shows an embodiment of a system 10 of the present invention. The system 10 may include a patient support 12 that supports a patient 14. The patient support 12 may be a table. Alternatively, the support 12 may be a chair or any other support structure.

The system 10 may further include a light source 16 that directs a beam of light 18 onto a cornea 20 of the patient 14. The light source 16 may be an Eximer laser that emits light at a wavelength, which ablates corneal tissue.

The system 10 may include an airflow module 22 that directs a flow of air 24 across the patient's cornea 20. The airflow module 22 may be supported by a stand 26. The

stand 26 may have wheels 28 that allow an operator to move the module 24 relative to the support 12 and the patient 14.

The airflow module 24 may be coupled to a control 5 console 30 by an air hose 32. The control console 30 may be coupled to a source of pressurized air (not shown) that provides a flow or air. By way of example, the source of pressurized air may be an air line in the building structure of the surgical site. Alternatively, the console 10 30 may contain a compressor to create a pressurized airflow.

The console 30 may include a control knob 34 that can be manipulated by an operator to control the flowrate of the air that flows across the cornea 20. The knob 34 may 15 be coupled to a valve (not shown) that can vary the flowrate. The console 30 may also have a readout 36 that displays the flowrate and/or pressure of the airflow.

Figure 2 shows an embodiment of the air flow module 24. The module 24 may have an outlet 38 designed to generate a 20 laminar flow of air across the cornea. Laminar airflow will create an airstream that will flow directly above the

cornea 20. A laminar airflow is preferred over turbulent flow which may allow contaminants to enter the region of the cornea. The outlet 38 may have one or more vent blades 40 that can be adjusted to vary the direction of the 5 airflow. The orientation of the blades 40 and the direction of airflow may be adjusted by manipulating wheel 42.

In operation, the module 24 is moved adjacent to the patient 14, and the console 30 and/or blades 40 are 10 adjusted to create a desired flow of air directly above the cornea 20. It is desirable to create an airflow that does not directly impinge the cornea to prevent corneal de- 15 hydration.

After the desired airflow is created, a surgeon creates a flap to expose the stroma of the cornea 20. The laser is 20 then excited to create the light beam 18 and ablate the cornea. After the cornea has been ablated, the flap is moved back to cover the exposed stroma. The airflow is then terminated and the module 24 is moved away from the support 12 so that the patient 14 can exit the surgical site.

While certain exemplary embodiments have been described and shown in the accompanying drawings, it is to be understood that such embodiments are merely illustrative of and not restrictive on the broad invention, and that this 5 invention not be limited to the specific constructions and arrangements shown and described, since various other modifications may occur to those ordinarily skilled in the art.